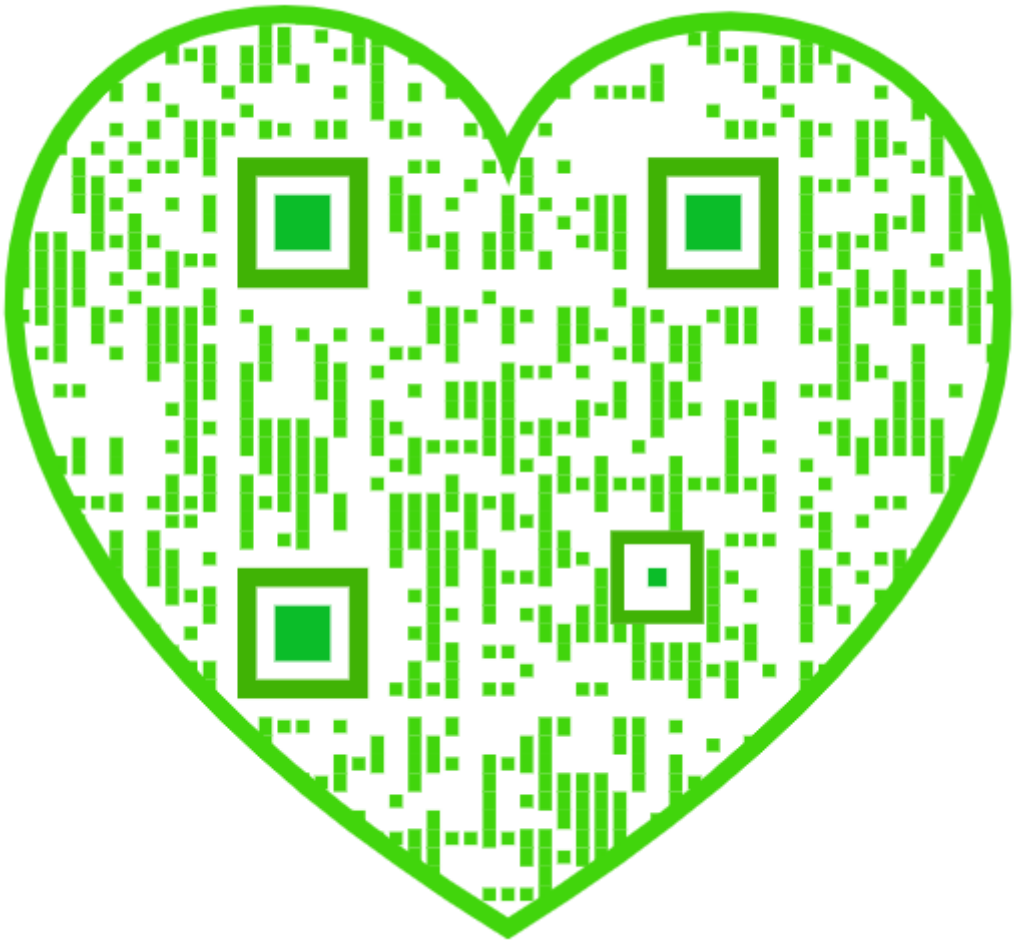


Journalism Versus Art

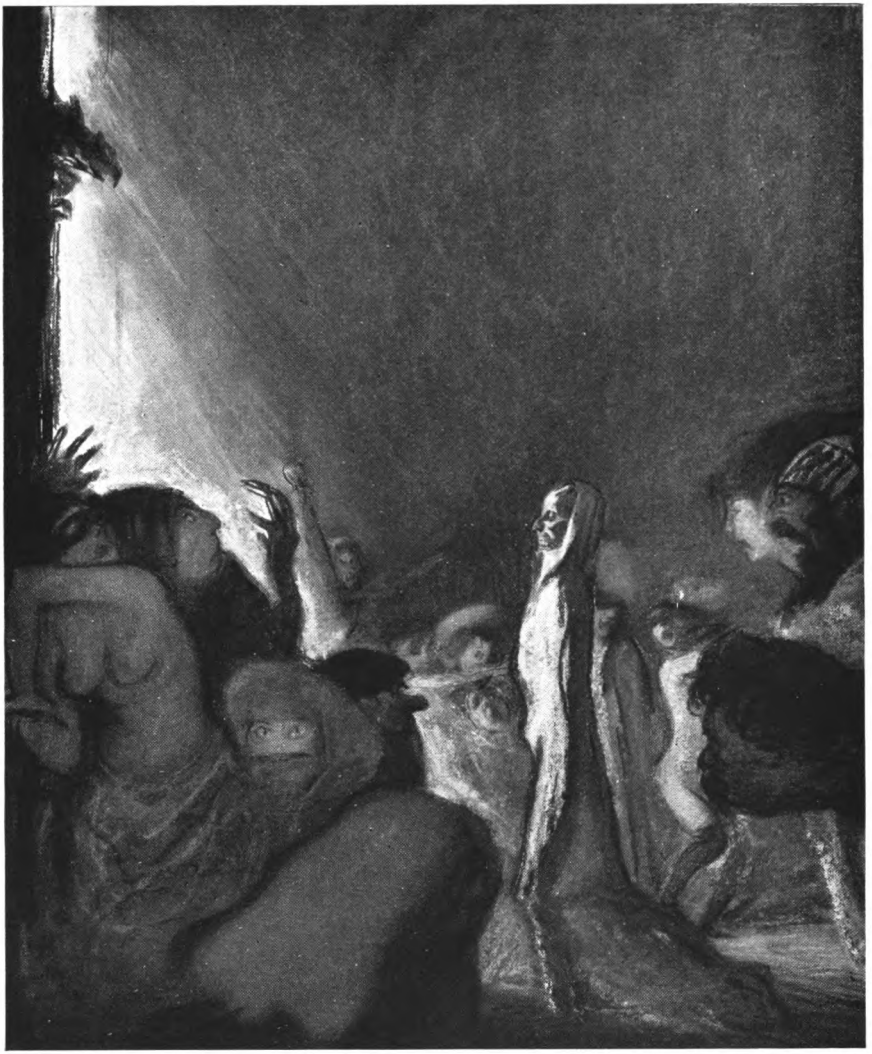
By MAX EASTMAN

ENJOYMENT OF POETRY

POEMS

UNDERSTANDING GERMANY

JOURNALISM VERSUS ART



THE MASK OF THE RED DEATH. BOARDMAN ROBINSON

Mr. Robinson was invited by the Century Magazine, *under a former editor, to do a series of paintings illustrating Edgar Allan Poe's stories. He made three, and they were all rejected because there was too much "horror" in them for* Century *readers. It is a pity to reproduce this picture without color, but as an example of what magazine standards would do to art, and to literature, the anecdote cannot be passed. Mr. Poe would be invited to go home and take some of the horror out of his stories, too, for circulation purposes.*

Journalism Versus Art

Max Eastman

Editor of "The Masses"
Formerly Associate in Philosophy
at Columbia University

New York *Alfred A. Knopf* *1916*

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PREFACE

I dedicate this little book to the artists of *The Masses* staff, including those who have withdrawn and those who are to come. I do so in the mood of a grateful if somewhat obstreperous pupil.

In the autumn of 1912 when our group happened together and decided to bring out a magazine which should publish art and literature without any canons of good journalism, I was exceedingly rustic in the appreciation of art. And my rusticity was considerably enhanced by a thorough knowledge of the "science of æsthetics." I had just come down from the oracle on Morningside Heights, where I had conducted, the previous winter, a course in the graduate school on the philosophy and psychology of beauty. In that course I had presented to my students some twenty-three classical definitions of beauty, and then proceeded to the best of my ability to annihilate them all, and to show that we apply the word beauty to objects so widely different externally, and so different also in their internal effects upon our organs,

that a true definition of the term is impossible. I taught that if we define the term beauty as a name for the objectification of pleasures that we feel in the *act* of perception, we shall come as near as possible to including all its important uses. But even then we shall find ourselves exaggerating a distinction that is neither clear nor of profoundest importance. For impressions that we quite passively receive may be, and are, called beautiful, and there is no reason in health or morals why they should not be.

Indeed the question whether we *can* define beauty, is secondary to the question whether it is important for us to do so. And it was my contention in those lectures, that in making so much of an alleged distinction between æsthetic values and other immediate values, such as the pleasures of poignant reality, of taste and touch and physical experiences, the philosophers had put the whole cultivated world off on a false track. The important distinction for us to remember and refine and philosophize about, is the distinction between all the immediate values, which have their certification in themselves, and those mediate, or moral, or practical values which look to some ulterior benefit to certify them. It seemed to me that if the English language were wise, it would contain a very eminent word (not altogether unlike

beauty, although less aristocratic) to express the whole range of things which are good simply because they are chosen. And among these things we should often find objects distinctly unbeautiful, and even unpleasant, because life has a thirst after experience which is very general, and is willing to suffer a good deal of pain for the sake of tasting its reality.

This was the philosophy of æsthetics at which I had abstractly arrived when I was elected, upon quite other grounds, to become the editor and general care-taker of a magazine whose pictorial destinies were to be jealously watched over by a group of "revolutionary" artists. It was a philosophy which did not seriously unfit me for that responsible honor, because it was so largely a mere liberation from unfruitful definitions. But still it was a philosophy, and I am sure that if I had been suspected of possessing such a thing, or of harboring however darkly in my memory twenty-three definitions of beauty, I would never have been elevated to that precarious post. It was as a simple rustic, acquainted only with some small matters of politics and literature, that I was designated by these artists to see that the spaces between their pictures were filled in with adequately revolutionary reading matter.

And for that I am glad, because it put me in a

rather humble mood, and enabled me to receive at their hands a very liberal education in the appreciation of art. I have learned to perceive a great many qualities in pictures that I might never have known to exist, and to discriminate one quality from another as I could never have done except through the microscope of the artist's extreme love of his art. And my reason for dedicating this book to those artists is that, without the refining of my perceptions which a friendly association with them has accomplished, I should never have ventured to come down from that abstract "philosophy of æsthetics," as I have in this essay on magazine art, and enter the field of concrete judgments. I think I may say that this essay reflects the feeling, and in some places even the thought and language of the artists of *The Masses*, in criticizing the art of the popular commercial magazine. I need not apologize, therefore, if I have taken for illustrations of a more various and freer art pictures most of which have been drawn by these artists for *The Masses*. This does not imply that our magazine itself intends to be an academy, or regards itself as grown up and arrived at any exclusiveness. But it does imply that our magazine is the only illustrated magazine in America which habitually declines to conciliate its readers, or to consider

either the advertisers or the subscription lists in deciding what art and what writing it shall publish. The fact that nobody is trying to make dividends out of *The Masses*, has given it a unique character, has given it the freedom for a perfectly wilful play of the creative faculties, such as would inevitably produce unique works of art.

Some time ago the New York papers announced a disagreement among the editors of *The Masses*, and the resignation of one or two of its artists. And they were happy to infer from this that the basic principle upon which the magazine was conducted, had proven utopian and unworkable. As disagreements and resignations frequently occur among their own editors, whose principle is the very workable one of publishing for profit, the inference was obviously a little extreme. But it seems important to state, in contradicting them, just what question it was upon which a division occurred among the editors of *The Masses*.

Some of the contributing editors, who are also the owners of this magazine, desired to make *The Masses* free, not only from any journalistic influence, but also from the influence of an editorial art. They wished to conduct their magazine somewhat in the manner of the new art galleries, in which each

artist is given an opportunity, subject only to the tolerance of his fellows, to exhibit at any given time anything that he chooses. That is, they wished to sacrifice the symmetry, completeness, order, timeliness, unity in variety, and so forth, of the magazine as a whole, to the ideal of unconditioned individual expression.

To the majority, while this seemed a valuable thing to do, it did not seem the best thing to do with *The Masses*. They desired *The Masses* to have form and policy, and they decided that the way to make such a magazine free, is to give to an editor a freedom of his own after the contributing artists and writers have produced or designated in general the material with which he is to work. It was upon this question, and not upon the deeper principle of freedom from journalistic standards, that the division occurred.

For my part I am still in the mood of a humble, although in this matter obstreperous, pupil to the artists who have made pictures for *The Masses*, and it is with profound gratitude for my education that I dedicate this little book to them.

MAX EASTMAN.

NOTE

These four essays have been published in magazines: "What Is the Matter with Magazine Art?" in *The Masses*, "Magazine Writing" in *Vanity Fair*, "Lazy Verse" in *The New Republic*, and "Why English Does Not Simplify Her Spelling" in *The North American Review*.

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WHAT IS THE MATTER WITH MAGAZINE ART?

Journalism Versus Art

WHAT IS THE MATTER WITH MAGAZINE ART?

DRAWING is destined to a high place among the arts, for drawings, like music, can be adequately reproduced and widely distributed. And while this has appeared a detriment in the light of aristocratic ideals, in the light of democracy it is a fine virtue. The ideal of democracy has indeed given to many artists of our day a new interest in drawing. Some of the best painters in America would draw for the popular magazines, if popular magazine editors had an interest in true art.

That the editors have not an interest in true art is due, I suppose, not to any natural depravity in them,

but to their struggle for existence under the prevailing system of journalism. And the system, briefly, is this:

A publication is a piece of goods manufactured and sold in competition with others for the benefit of a stock company that owns it. The stockholders as a group are interested in dividends. They hire an editor to put out a publication that will sell, and they pay him according to his success. Editors, like human beings, are prone to eat food, and beget families, which is to say that their tastes and ideas are subject to an economic interpretation. And so they seek to mix into their publication a little bit of everything that will sell. The editorial art is the art of ever attracting a new constituency without alienating the old. The result, an insane passion for variety, but a perfectly automatic toning down of every variant that appears. A profitable mediocrity —sometimes called a "golden mean"—is the editorial ideal.

And artists, like editors, are "economically determined." They learn to draw pictures that will sell,

pictures that will attract ever new constituents without alienating the old. Or if their native impulse to be an individual, an object of hate as well as of love, is too strong—then they do not draw for publication at all, which comes to the same thing in its effect upon magazine art.

This, then, is the diagnosis of published art in America. It is business art. It does not aim to achieve the beautiful, the real, the ideal, the characteristic, the perfect, the sublime, the ugly, the grotesque, the harmonious, the symmetrical, or any other of those ends that various schools of art and art criticism have with similar merit set before them. It aims to achieve profits in competition. And any or all of those genuinely artistic aims are subordinated to that.

At this point, certain persons whom I should wish to have disagree with me throughout life and literature, will chime in with, "Yes, you're right. The trouble is that the people don't want true art, and the magazines have to give the people what they want."

The trouble is not so simple. It would not take "the people" long to discover and express their likings for true art, if enough true art, enough kinds of true art, were offered them. Only they would not all discover likings for the same kind. And that is what makes competitive business so incompatible with the artist's ideal. True art is not one and indivisible, the same to-day, yesterday, and forever. Indeed, the more highly evolved a group of art works is, the more do individual specimens differ, and the more certain it is that some people will definitely dislike some specimens. And so it falls out that, although plenty of people would like true art, still the effort to please a great many people all the time and never to displease any, results in a drab and mediocre semblance of art.

Might we not almost define good art—braving the learned dogmas of the schools—as art which gives a high degree of satisfaction to those who like it? And does it not almost follow that it will give equal dissatisfaction to those who do not like it? But the aim of a money-making magazine is to give neither

intense pleasures nor intense displeasures to a few, but to please everybody a little all the time—namely, about ten or fifteen cents' worth. Then only can the editors feel steadfast and sure in regard to those dividends.

Let us consider the prevailing features of magazine art in America, and judge if they do not sustain this diagnosis. We shall find that they each arise out of the desire *to please everybody a little and displease none.*

I

Magazine art tends to be photographic. By which I mean that it tries to reproduce every portion of a figure, as seen from a certain point, with mechanical preciseness—eliminating all those lights and shadows, emergings and recedings, suppressions and distortions of external reality which the individual human factor puts into a perception. The trained magazine artist has carefully destroyed all his own warm and lovable idiosyncrasies, and turned himself into a reproducing machine which can "go over" a

canvas from top to bottom, and "put in" with unerring accuracy everything that "ought to" be there. He is a highly skilled person. He knows how to draw men, horses, buttons, pants, books, hatracks, seltzer bottles, shoes, shoestrings, cats, frowns, kisses, hot-water bottles, anything and everything, scattered or combined; but how to draw a single human perception he has not the slightest idea.

Nor does he need one, for his accurate reproductions in skillful perspective give a certain rudimentary satisfaction to everybody—the satisfaction of saying, "My, ain't that a good likeness!"

We have the authority of Aristotle that this—"the pleasure of recognition"—is most fundamental and universal of the æsthetic pleasures. But we do not need any authority, for every honest person—even the pastmaster of futurism—will have to confess that still the child in him takes a rudimentary satisfaction in this feat when it is well done.

At the time when I grew beyond a purely childish interest in pictures, I formed the habit of looking

through the comic weeklies for drawings by Art Young. If any one then had asked me why I liked these drawings better than others, I should have said: "I don't know—they're so funny looking." But I could say more than that now. I could say that Art Young was almost the first popular draughtsman in America to quit drawing standard types, pictures of pictures of pictures of people, and begin drawing people—the people around him the way they look through his eyes. And that they look "funny," and look as they never looked before and never will again, was not a discovery peculiar to me.

Consider his "Nice Cool Sewer" picture from *The Masses* for May, 1913. A critic on the *Evening Mail* declares that this drawing is "already a classic" —but I find people who do not like it. They think it is not "done." "Why, his hands look like mittens!" they say. "They're not hands!"

No—they are not hands, not objective hands, hands in the abstract, hands from a hand factory. They are a certain peculiar individual's perception of

the hands of a certain peculiar man, a tired man, a man sunk onto a chair at the end of a dirty day's work, a man who feels bad and smells bad to himself, and wishes he were abed.

However, there is no entering a brief for the picture, no judging its artistic merit. The final truth about its merit is that some people will *see* the picture, and some will not, but those who see it will see it with great joy, for it is not a picture of a picture, nor yet even a picture of a man, but a picture of a perception of a man.

The difference between drawing a man and drawing a perception of a man, is akin to the difference between knowledge and experience. The thing an artist has to do is to transcend his knowledge and win his way back to experience. Take a crude illustration. If you, being as stupid about these things as I am, set out to draw a man going east, you would do it the first time in this fashion:

That would be a poor picture of a man going east, and you would decide that you know very little about

"'I GORRY, I'M TIRED!"

"THERE YOU GO! YOU'RE TIRED! HERE I BE STANDIN' OVER A HOT STOVE ALL DAY, AN' YOU WORKIN' IN A NICE COOL SEWER!"

ARTHUR YOUNG

physiognomy. On the contrary, however, you know too much. Your knowledge is what got in your way. You know, for instance, what is the shape of a man's eye, and you drew a picture of your knowledge instead of drawing the looks of an eye. Empty yourself of that knowledge, and you will draw it this way: Somewhat the way it looks.

I here reach the limit of my artist training, but no more is needed to show the usual progress toward real drawing. It is a progress away from *knowledge about* things toward *experience of* things, away from abstraction toward concrete perception.

And when we pass beyond the photographic, or kodak, style of art, we are only taking further steps in the same direction. For, strangely enough, a photograph is a good deal more like knowledge than it is like perception. It has perspective, to be sure, but that is all it has that resembles visual experience. When we *look at* an object we allow our own character, our memories, predilections, interests, emotions,

ideas, to determine what we shall see and how we shall see it. We do something. We go out and seize the salient details of the object, and we overemphasize, and perfect, and condense, and alter, and mutilate, and idealize—in short, we perform the creative act of perception. And when artists draw creatively, when they draw with individuality, as we say, and with freedom, they are simply coming nearer to that natural act of ours. They are coming nearer to real experience.

Great artists have always drawn in this way. There is nothing modern that departs more boldly from what we *know* the human proportions to be, than the drawings of Michael Angelo. There is nothing less like a photograph than the sketches of Leonardo.

But most magazine illustrators have never caught the fever of individual being. They have never declared themselves free and independent of customary knowledge; they have never gone beyond catering to the rudimentary pleasure of recognition. And in a commercial way it is well for them, because if

they should put their own individual vision strongly into a picture, a great many people to whom their

A DRAWING BY REMBRANDT

individuality is uncongenial, would dislike the picture, whereas the *mere act of easy recognition pleases everybody a little.*

II

When magazine art is not photographic, it makes up for that by being neat and "slick." Perhaps *chique* is the technical word. I mean that if there is anything omitted or varied by the individual mind of the artist, the variation is so definite, arbitrary, and regular, as to carry us still farther away from a real perception instead of nearer to it. No one could accuse the usual magazine poster prodigy of being photographic. On the contrary, it is nothing but a pattern, a conventionalized symbol, a deft mechanically cut and trimmed diagram remotely suggesting a young lady in the agonies of fashionable attire.

Let us compare with it a drawing which is still less photographic. I choose one that was exhibited at the McDowell Society in New York a while ago. One of the chief virtues of this drawing, in comparison with the usual poster is that it is not a drawing of a girl. But that is not the virtue I mean to point out. I mean to point out that here is a drawing

even more abbreviated, more incomplete, less filled up with meat, but which comes right back to reality, instead of going farther away from it. For those

A DRAWING BY MAURICE BECKER

who can see it, this is a most true, intimate, and final picture of a certain dog—sketched with unerring loyalty to the eye, and sketched, moreover, with liv-

ing sympathy and emotion. For those who see it, it is exquisite, but for those who do not, it is only a piece of old newspaper—the last thing in the world to pay money for. And so it is not a magazine drawing, while the chique young lady of the poster decidedly is. For neatness of execution—no matter how inhuman and foolish the subject matter—*pleases everybody a little.* Sometimes we call it "decorative"—and sometimes it is!

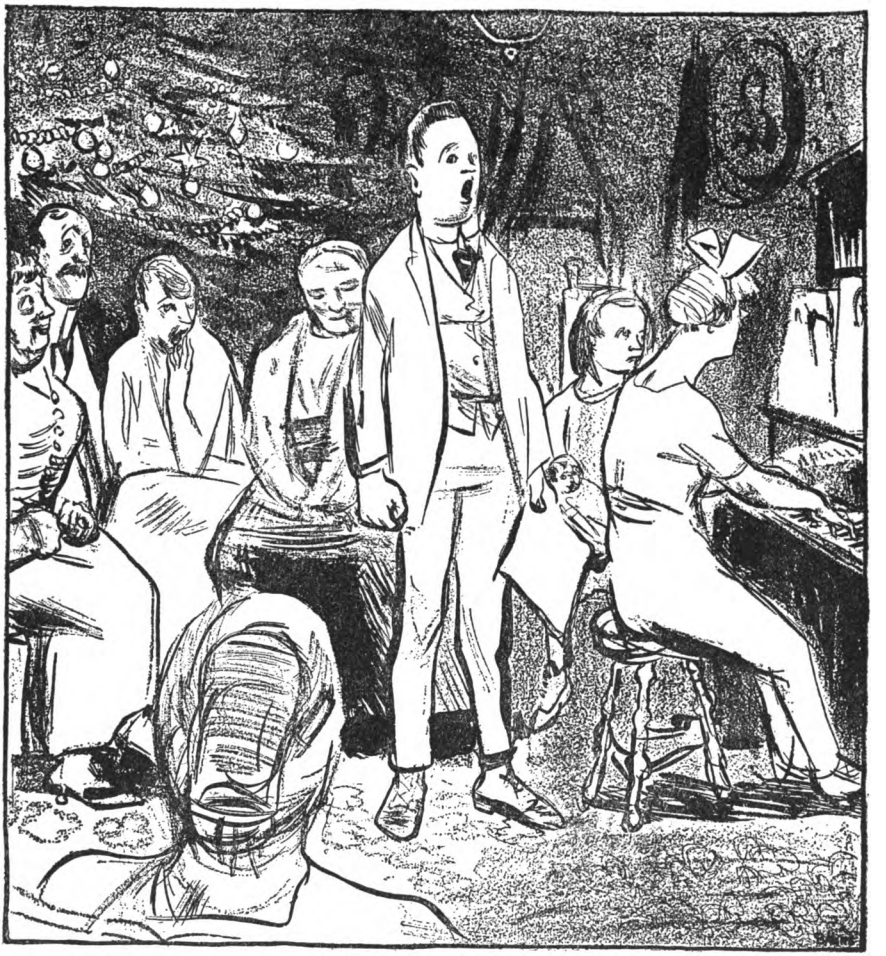
III

When magazine drawings express feeling, the feelings they express are only the obvious and conventional ones of average people with coins in their pockets.

Wistfulness in a pretty girl—indicated by arching her eyebrows clear up into her hair.

Adventurous although stylish athleticism in a young man—indicated in the jaw and pants.

Romance in the meeting of the two—indicated by his gazing upon the earth, she upon infinity.



JOSIE'S ELDEST SINGING "NONE SO DAUNTLESS AND FREE ON LAND OR ON SEA!" CORNELIA BARNS

Pathos of old age—indicated with bending knees or a market basket.

Sweet and divine innocence of children—usually indicated in the stockings.

These are the principal sentiments appealed to. And I would not suggest that these sentiments are of any less intrinsic worth than others, only why ding dong upon them perpetually, page after page, and month after month—except because they are the obvious and rudimentary sentiments which everybody feels, and all feel in substantially the same way, and all like to see expressed? Whereas, if you delve down into those passions which are deep and elemental, you find thousands who will resent your manner of expressing them; and if you drift out into those veins of feeling which are high-wrought, and subtle, and not to be named with names, you will find that people differ so much in these feelings that one will be attuned to one picture and another to another, and there is danger of losing the old constituency while you are attracting the new. And thus it is more profitable to hammer away upon the tonic chord of

ordinary humane feeling, where we are all alike, and will go patiently out and pay down our fifteen cents for the same old song.

IV

When magazine art expresses ideas, these are the ideas most obvious and most current among those who can afford to buy.

Many years back, for example, *Life* has been profiting upon pictures in ridicule of the idea of woman suffrage, and the feminist movement in general. But after Mrs. Pankhurst woke up the press, and through that the world, to the biological significance and power of the change in women, the profit upon female ridicule dwindled. The idea of the Eternal Feminine as a Perfect Lady grew a little less obvious than it used to be. And so *Life* one day graciously persuaded itself to bring out a "Pro-Suffrage Number," advertising among its artists for pictures expressing the values of a real woman. Now this little gamble on opinions is only a kind of frivolous example of the general art policy I have outlined

—to attract ever a new constituency and yet not alienate the old. I believe that *Life* could profit now—just because people are beginning to acquire a degree of mercy toward men almost equal to that they feel toward animals—by dropping anti-vivisection and bringing out a Pro-Jewish number. And doubtless the artists would excel, as they did in the Pro-Suffrage number. For obviously no true works of expressive art can be created when the thing to be expressed is determined, not by the naturally unconventional promptings of native inspiration, but by an editor scared into a mania for the obvious. However, the very trick of cartoon expression, the graphic representation of an idea—*any idea that is not radically displeasing in itself*—gives a slight pleasure to almost anybody.

V

Magazine art is monotonous. Well, everything there is much of is monotonous. But magazine art makes an ideal of monotony. "The Gibson Girl," "The Christy Girl," "The Stanlaws Girl," "The Harrison Fisher Girl"—these are features to be ad-

vertised on the front cover. And yet what is the advertisement, but an obituary notice of these men as artists? It certifies that they have given up their profession of realizing in line the varieties of life's experience, and gone into the manufacturing business. They are now turning out an article that will sell widely in competition, because it is modelled strictly on the lines here indicated; and while they may find it profitable to vary the model a little from year to year, as progressive manufacturers do, the main lines were laid down in the first big sale, and no risks will be taken.

I do not want to lessen the glory that naturally adheres to these men for having created these types. Charles Dana Gibson is the original discoverer of the psycho-physical law that an anatomically impossible amount of space between the eye and the eyebrow of the female produces a romantic reaction in the male. This was a big discovery in every way. It was long known that certain slight physical abnormalities are a sex stimulus. We found that out almost as soon as we came down from the trees, and

"YOUR HONOR, THIS WOMAN GAVE BIRTH TO A NAKED CHILD!"
ROBERT MINOR

we used to get the girls to alter themselves a little instead of just altering their pictures. At least so the anthropologists tell us. But, at any rate, the art was forgotten, and the rediscovery of its charm was altogether a new thing and a big thing.

So big, in fact, that it seemed to overwhelm the artist, and he stopped there, and went into the business of manufacturing paper ladies—a business which quite wrecked his art, so far at least as the youthful female is concerned. In the characterizing of the male and the elderly female, Gibson has always been an artist, has always enjoyed within natural limitations of feeling, the varieties of life. He is the best magazine artist who ever learned the trick of pleasing everybody a little. Perhaps, however, his naturally not very wide range of feeling—never transcending a genial and humane interest—has made this possible. So that even in these respects in which he is a true artist, Gibson is still an example of the monotony that is inevitable in pleasing everybody a little. Descend to the imitators—the millions of manufacturers of the girl of the far-

away-look—and we find monotony so idealized, entrenched, and confirmed by commercial success, that we cannot characterize their separate styles at all. We can only say that the thought of a magazine cover makes us tired.

VI

One kind of variety, indeed, has been found profitable by all editors—and that is variety in the shape of pictures and their disposition upon the page. And this variety has been cultivated as carefully as monotony in the pictures themselves. The principal function of the art-editor is to fix a magazine so that when it is held loosely in the left hand, and the pages run off rapidly by the right thumb, a sort of kaleidoscopic motion-picture results. Black spots and queer blotches are seen dashing from one part of the page to another, and the effect is quite stimulating to the curiosity. This is no proof that after the purchase is made, any one enjoys reading type which jumps across, over, under and around the misshapen angles of an extraneous insert. It is no proof that any one

"GEE, MAG, THINK OF US BEIN' ON A MAGAZINE COVER!"

Cover design of The Masses for June, 1913)

enjoys looking at pictures which are jumped across, and poked into, by fragments of irrelevant letter-press. No—merely that this "variety of make-up" has the look of a circus as you pass by. And you never remember how you are fooled. You bite again at the next flutter.

This may be an extreme statement, but I doubt if anybody really likes a picture of a horse-race with the rear-end of a horse racing off one page, and the forward quarters racing onto the other, and a half-inch white margin intervening. It is impossible to put much speed into such a picture. It is impossible to put much heart into the creation of a picture that is to be so treated.

VII

Besides being mutilated and vivisected, magazine drawings are belittled. And this is one thing that cannot happen to a story. A story may be lost in the scramble for advertising. It may be given a fairly formidable appearance at the front of the magazine, and then peter out into a long, dreary little

tail coiling its way among tomato cans, and tobacco, and beer, at the back. But the story must needs be legible, if it is worth printing at all. And if it is legible, then it exists as a work of art. But not so the pictures. A picture may exist at eight-by-twelve inches, and be absolutely annihilated in the reduction to one-and-a-half-by-two. We might say that the average picture in our popular magazine is about half alive. The vigor is squeezed out of it by the engraver; and even then it is given no margin, no space in which to breathe.

All of which is but a further evidence of the commercial idealism that determines and controls this art. A magazine which is "chuck full of pictures and stuff" seems to be a fat bargain. No matter whether the pictures really exist or not—they look as though they did, and the number is large, and it takes a long time to crowd one's way through the magazine, and one feels as though he were getting his money's worth. And while this may be a small satisfaction for so much trouble, it is a satisfaction that *everybody enjoys a little.*

VIII

Magazine drawings are mainly "illustrative." Their creation is usually initiated and accomplished somewhat in the following manner:

The editor hands a manuscript to a poor man who is—metaphorically at least—hungry. "We want two illustrations for this," he says, "and we must have them by the fourteenth—play up the woman."

The artist goes home and reads the story. He does not enjoy it, and he has no desire to illustrate it. He probably never had a desire to illustrate any story. Neither did the author have a desire to have anybody illustrate his story. Neither does the editor have any desire to see an illustration of the story. Neither does the reader consider the illustration an addition to the story.

All the reader cares about is that the magazine should not look dull when he approaches it; all the editor cares about is that the reader should be led to approach it; all the author cares about is that he should have a popular artist's name attached to his

story; and all the artist cares about is that he should sufficiently conform to the business standard of art so that the editor will give him a full, or at least a half-page, and pay him a full or at least a half-price.

Of course, these statements are sweeping and not strictly true. But they are more true than any other sweeping statements you could make about the popular art of illustrating stories. Except at those times when an artist and an author spontaneously discover in themselves a real harmony of inspiration—and those times are rare—we may say that the illustrator's business is but an adventitious appendage to a real art. But it is an easy way to promote that variety of physical make-up which furnishes a slight pleasure to everybody and no great displeasure to any.

It would be agreeable to dwell in anticipation upon the nature of magazine art in the distant future, when the ideals of the business office have ceased to reign supreme; but it would be impossible. For one

cannot describe a thing whose very excellence shall consist in continual and surprising variation. Magazine art will be true art, and every work of true art is unique. The only way, therefore, in which it can be described in general is to say that it will be free from the tyranny of this demand that everybody be pleased with it—free to make enemies as well as friends.

Such art can never flourish under the commercial editor. To say nothing of the strain put upon his business by publishing something shockingly but surely great, he must also be ready to take chances upon that which is shocking but not surely great. Like the artist himself, or the poet, he must live the experimental life. Fear and a failure of the spirit of adventure are the death of art. Recklessness is its life. And if ever there appears on this earth such a thing as an editorial art, it will be when commercial timidity is removed from the inner office and a spirit of free and genuine sport is enshrined there.

We can perhaps point out, in conclusion, one or two little things that the true magazine art of the

future will *not* be, and this will help people to recognize it when it begins to appear.

It will not be *carelessness of technique* taking the place of carefulness. No artist is free whose hand is not wholly under the dominion of his feeling or his idea.

It will not be an *imitation of foreign monstrosities* supplanting the native monstrosities of America. Art need have no national boundaries, but this does not mean that the imitation of Germans or Frenchmen is any more inspiring than the imitation of the folks at home.

It will not be realism supplanting idealism. It will not be love of the poignant supplanting love of the perfect, nor any one artistic ideal supplanting any other. They are all human and they are all divine, those ideals of art. And the important thing is that the appreciator—and here again, the editor—shall know how to judge each work by its own standard, and not by the standard of something else. The function of the critic—if he has any—is to encourage every creator to be himself at his best.

A PORTRAIT. PABLO PICASSO

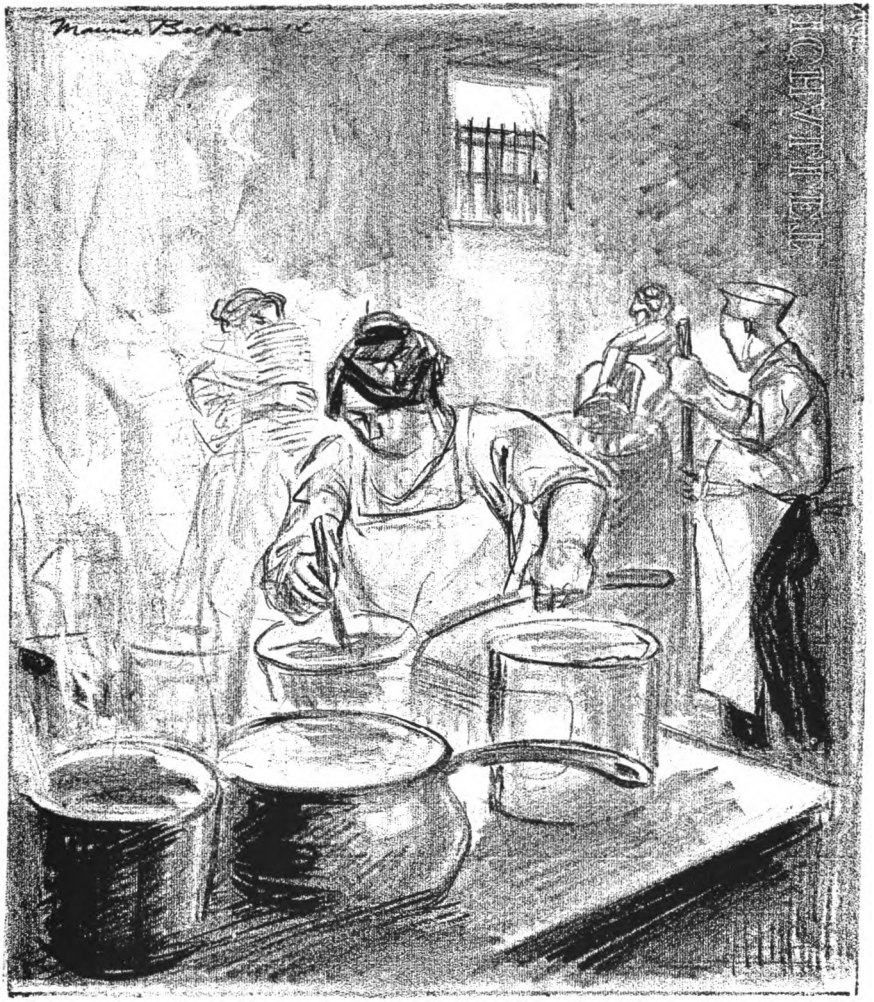
It will not be drawings of the ugly and disgusting, the slops and drippings of a miserable civilization, supplanting the drawings of the festive and beautiful. A little while ago, a paragraph in *Collier's Magazine* presumed to denounce from the standpoint of morality some of the young artists of our times, and I quote it:

Many of the stern young moralists who are winning fame by their pictures in our magazines seem (to paraphrase a homely proverb) to have the same bad smell up their nostrils. Their people are gawky, greasy, febrile, and mean; they are doing contemptible things in a graceless, animal sort of fashion; their backgrounds are dingy, tawdry, and slovenly or unsanitary. Life is shown in the guise of the thriftless seeker after low pleasures. And yet these artists are intelligent, educated, alive, with the artists' deft hand and trained eye. They prove it by drawing a revolting bunch of cats and dogs prowling about some overturned garbage cans!

The life of a great and eager city is all about them —you can see courtesy in the subway and devotion to duty in many a dingy shop, but they prefer the manners and labors of the roof garden. One may see men stopping in the street to stare up at the amazing beauty of our tall buildings against the misty blue of the September

sky, but these are not artists, only low fellows whose immigration hither should have been prevented by law!

If this paragraph had been written from the standpoint of art, it would be but another proof of the fact that anything strong makes enemies as well as friends. But the paragraph was written from the standpoint of morality. And I have to say that it is a queer morality which can escape the grip of the tragic problems of our time by turning the eyes in another direction. If there is a tendency among free and democratic artists to linger among destitutes and prostitutes and those whom exploitation has driven to vagrancy and crime, this is not because these seem truer subjects of art, but because they are subjects of art which have so long been unrecognized. They are problems of moral reflection, moreover, which have too long been unstudied. It may, indeed, be true that freedom to see and sing these realities has turned the heads—or the hearts—of some poets and artists. They may have fallen a little in love with the sordid for its own sake, but certainly



THE OCEANSIDE HOTEL REPORTS A COOL SUMMER. MAURICE BECKER

they are upon the heights both of health and virtue, when they are compared with those moralists who solve the profoundest questions of our civilization by the simple device of looking up into the sky where the clouds are floating so sweetly over the tall buildings. They may be "stern"—these young artists—but if the world, like the writer of that paragraph, proves too frivolous to face them, then it will be so much the worse for the world.

It is my part, however, to point out that not the painting of any particular truths will distinguish the art of the future, but the freedom to paint them all—a freedom which carries untold possibilities and untold dangers. If the new love of this freedom has arisen in artists who are big enough to stand it, then we are on the verge of a great era in popular art. But if these artists prove only little bantams, who have their heads turned the first time they find out they can crow—it is vain to hope for anything but a new series of monomanias. The fetters are removed—the wings are free—there is room for untrammelled and universal genius. But self-infatuation,

attitudinizing, artificiality of technique, erotic attachment to a queer subject matter, these internal

WASHINGTON SQUARE. GLENN O. COLEMAN

fetters are as quick and sure death to liberty as academic custom or ancestor worship.

If intelligence is given its sovereignty, and if men of universality arise, the twentieth century will see an age of art and poetry surpassing that of Elizabeth, because to the splendid paganism and great gusto of the free in those days will be added the ideals and the achievements of science and democracy. But if intelligence is renounced for temperament, if Art and not Life becomes the center of interest, if men prove too little for the adventure—then debauchment and dementia præcox are the harvest, and the hope is postponed.

MAGAZINE WRITING

MAGAZINE WRITING

"WHAT is the matter with magazine writing?" said the editor: "We want two thousand words."

"What will you pay me per word?" said I. And in that question I stated, better than two thousand words can tell, what is the matter with magazine writing.

Magazine writing is professional. It is work and not play. And for that reason it is never profoundly serious or intensely frivolous enough to captivate the spirit. It lacks abandon. It is simply well done.

To me, I confess, it is amazingly well done. The quantity and fluency and consummate skill of these multiplying pages is one of the wonders of our age. I find myself dreading lest the mere number of things and combinations of things that can be, or

happen, or be imagined on the surface of a small planet will give out, and the magazines have to quit because it is all done. But they come right along, crowded with clever and lucid and entertaining and perfectly satisfactory sentences and paragraphs. They have the trade of literature polished and refined to the last item.

But it does not captivate us. Professional excellence never does.

The desire to support oneself, and if possible one's family, is a civilized expression of that instinct of self-preservation which lies at the heart of all animal and vegetable life. And this desire is so fundamental, so strong, and so accustomed to bend all other passions, whims, caprices, energies and ideas, to its service, that when it is once aroused and functioning, nothing else in us can withstand it. A man is either living, or earning his living. He is never doing these two things, purely, at once.

And the literature we love is the literature whose motive is pure living. It is the utter and extreme play of the central nervous system in an organism

tragically committed by its heredity to the continual performance of work. In that play alone are the serious things born—the things of impersonal and universal import. In that play alone is the heart altogether gay and inconsiderate.

Perhaps you will think that if gayety and serious passion are really captivating, they ought to sell at a high price, and therefore the commercial motive ought to reinforce instead of damping them. But for a peculiar reason you are wrong. The business motive is *to please as many readers as possible, and to offend none.* That is what the editor is hired by the stockholders to do, and that is what the editor hires the writer to do. And the writer cannot do that by allowing *himself* to flow into his pen, for then, though he will captivate those who like that kind of a self, he will offend those who do not. In order to please everybody and offend none, he must eliminate all these warm and spontaneous impulses that are his very own, whatever they be, and confine his efforts to the creation of superficially and obviously "pleasant" qualities, like fluency, and wit,

and the glamor of sexuality and money, and a few touches of pathos and purity, and no difficulties for the understanding. Everybody likes this a little, and nobody dislikes it much. Therefore it sells as widely as it is advertised. But as soon as anyone cuts loose, and lets riot his own unique forms of recklessness or religion, his writing gets a strong raw flavor that those who like it may like very much, but those who hate it will abhor. It *might* sell, but that would be an accident, and one can not support a family on accidents.

The manner in which this commercial preoccupation passes along the editor's nerves and outward to the brains of his contributors is sometimes very subtle. Young writers are told they must "come to New York and get the hang" of the profession. At other times, however, it is not subtle at all. One of our esteemed illustrators in a moment of abandon painted a girl with a puppy in her arms for a magazine cover. The editor sent it back and asked him to change the puppy, because they had tried a puppy before, and found that their readers "didn't like to

THE ORANGO-TANGO. JOHN SLOAN

see a girl's affections wasted on an animal." This courteous consideration of editors for their readers' feelings comes nearer to Christian charity than anything else we have.

Another audacious person wrote a story for the *Atlantic Monthly* with an uproarious boarding-house celebration in it. Somebody yelled "Who swiped my beer?" which, being passed through the editor's commercial refining-mill, came out in the magazine, "Please pass the fudge!"

You will believe these stories if you are a magazine writer. And you will believe them if you are a magazine editor, and know what it is to see sitting like a barometer of calamity over your desk, supervising every stroke of the blue pencil, that fluctuating subscription list.

Sometimes it is subtle, and sometimes it is obvious, but always it is true, that magazine literature is presided over by the monotonous desire to do business. Magazine literature contains no accidents. It takes no chances. It is never cracked up the middle. It is never fragmentary. It is never

mussy with the individual finger-prints of him who loved it too hard. It is never queer; it is never grotesque; never alien, or exaggerated, or sublime. It has always the professional finish, the smooth round regular decorated mechanical perfection characteristic of all goods that are turned out in large quantities to sell.

The reason I understand this thing so well is that in a small way I have been through it. It has been the inflexible rule of my life never to try to earn money by writing. The last time I broke this inflexible rule was when I wanted to go to Europe to see the war. I did not want to go as a war-correspondent, but merely as a human being who can see things to be as stupid as they are without starving to death. So I decided to earn my expenses before I started. I approached one of our popular-magazine editors and said: "Here, I want to write so many dollars' worth of article for you on such and such a subject, which I happen to know about, and I will write it to your order, any way you want. I will write it first, and submit it, and you will tell

me what is the matter with it, and I will go home and write it over again, and so on until you get exactly what you want. I guarantee satisfaction."

He accepted my offer, and I wrote an article and read it to him. He told me it was "no good," and told me why. I threw it away and wrote another on the same subject. He liked one or two paragraphs. I saved those and wrote another article around them. He liked all but a few paragraphs. I cut those, and wrote more to his order. He accepted my article, and I took my money and left.

When I came home from Europe my friends gathered round with a sad expression, and asked me what was the matter with my writing.

"That article doesn't have any quality," they said. "It is just well written." I told them that I had learned the trade.

There are people who have a genius so universally charming that it rides over all these automatic tendencies to a triumph at once literary and professional—people like Peter Dunne. Let us not

bother with these exceptions. We are talking about the generality of gifted young men and women who aspire so nobly to the literary art, and fall so automatically into the magazine trade. And we are talking also about some exceptional individuals, whose fall was more distinguished. Elbert Hubbard, Gouverneur Morris, Robert W. Chambers, Jack London—but why reproach all the many writers, who themselves know that professionalism has blighted the excellent genius of which they, and we, had once such illuminating hopes? Let us only reproach those four!

Was it not better for literature in the days when they paid too little to entice many of us to write for a living? Charles Lamb was a wise man. He waited around an accountant's office long enough to draw a little pay-envelope, and then slipped quietly home and wrote whatever he pleased. And the result was individual, exquisite perfection—unsaleable at large, but adored in bliss by those who love it.

Perhaps it was still better in the earlier days when

IN CHINA

CHINESE PATROL RECONNOITRING. HONORÉ DAUMIER

princes would pay a poet just for existing, and let him compose at his fancy. But I do not believe so. Art is always in danger of removing itself from real life; and the dominant feature of real life is the pressure of necessity; and the artist, the writer, ought to taste that, and taste it strong. Only he ought not to *create* under the impulse of that pressure for an insanely competitive market. Charles Lamb was a wise man. He took life on its own tragic terms, and he settled the bill. His office work was tedious, but his art was the pure play of a complete spirit.

So what magazine writing needs to-day is a *standard of amateurism*. That is what all art needs. We cherish that standard in sport, where it does very little good and quite an amount of harm. We deprive an Indian youth of the Olympian medal for all-round athletics, because somebody digs up a stale memory that he once played baseball in a bush-league for money, as he had to. That is idealism of a kind. It is misplaced idealism. It ought to be placed in the world of art, where it

would just save art from that professional standardization which continually kills it.

It is appalling to reflect what the mere necessity of earning a living can do to an English prose style. If you were offered $5.00 a paragraph, would you divide your paragraphs in the broad, logical manner of Macaulay? Well, for five cents a word, you will not write words with the weighty brevity of Emerson or Epictetus. You will write like an indictment clerk. Here is an example of the way an indictment clerk writes:

"The specific charge against Mrs. Mohr was that she 'did feloniously and with malice aforethought aid, assist, abet, counsel, hire, command and procure Cecil Victor Brown, George W. Healis and Henry W. Spellman to feloniously and with malice aforethought kill and slay C. Franklin Mohr.' "

And the reason an indictment clerk writes that way, is that in the old English law-courts they used to pay the professional scribes so many pennies per folio for copying legal documents. It was not that any lawyer ever wanted to express anything clearly

or unmistakably. It was simply that professional scribes had to make a living by the word, and the more words there were, the larger the living they made. A similar, although more subtle employment of English is being automatically forced upon the magazine writers of America by the present method of estimating literary values in a commercial office.

The worst thing we can say about popular magazine editors is that they are corruptors of youth. The whole commercial magazine system is, in fact, bent upon the spiritual ruin of talented young people with a beautiful ambition. Here is a sensitive young man from Tioga, Pennsylvania, who grew up on a farm, working around the barn for his living, but spending the whole strength of his spirit for perhaps ten years producing and perfecting a novel that is an intense and compelling work of art. He sends it to a publisher, and it is bought and issued, and wins its way with the public. Inside of five days this innocent youth receives a letter from a magazine man offering to pay his expenses down to New York to talk business. He comes, of course. He is

excited and happy. He never had any money. What he had was high feeling, patience, persistence, a love of perfection, a spirit tuned to make melodies in its contact with reality. This magazine man grabs hold of him, stuns him with a point-blank offer of a larger sum of money than he ever knew how to think about, and proceeds to force him to sit down and turn out another novel inside of ten months, the first three chapters to be delivered a week from next Wednesday! That is the way in which our magazine system is corrupting the literary art of this period. Commercial mediocrity, commercial mutilation,[1] commercial timidity, commercial "finish," commercial dilution, and above all

[1] When this essay was published in a popular magazine the entire rhythmical force and meaning was removed from its concluding paragraph by the magazine-man in order to make room for a picture of a female middle wearing an "abdominal reducer" and a pair of "girdle pants" made out of rubber, and for sale at $6.00 and $25.00 a pair respectively. And yet the editor of that magazine had spontaneously asked me to write the article as an attack on this custom of buying literature by the yard, and cutting and filling holes with it as though it were a string of homogeneous cheesecloth. What hope is there of the other magazine editors?

A DRAWING BY K. R. CHAMBERLAIN

the commercial *tempo* are incompatible with the very spirit of creative art.

Barring the hope of some profound revolution, which may give us all a chance to earn a quiet, useful living in a reasonable number of hours without frenzy, I see no glories ahead for magazine literature. It will continue to be as it is. The big circulation-getters with a gift for keeping everything interesting though ordinary, will continue to buy up and dilute the best talents of the country; a few amateur magazines, which can not afford to pay for anything, will continue to exhibit a lower average of talent, but a more poignant variety of art; every once in a while a native popular genius will ride over all these tendencies of the time; and so on, until some deeper change than any of us can imagine.

LAZY VERSE

LAZY VERSE

JOURNALISM is the unique literary achievement of this age. And journalism has brought some benefit to the literary tradition. It has elevated lucidity and human interest to the high place of esteem where in a democratic society they belong. It has made the laborious task of imitating library echoes, in order to get into the *Atlantic Monthly*, unnecessary. It has rendered book-fed and literarious writers as obscure as they are tiresome. But journalism is not literature; it is business. And with some accidental exceptions the tendency of journalism to insert itself into the place of literature is a disaster to the art of writing. I am thinking of the new dilute variety of prosy poetry which is watering the country, and in order to separate myself from those who have any conventional or technical prejudice against composing poetry without meter I call it Lazy Verse.

Amazing are the metaphysical theories which those who produce this material put up to justify their professional incapacity for the intense rhapsodies of art. I am not going to dispute those theories, for of all obvious rationalizations of personal inclination, the so-called "sciences" which an artist constructs about his art are the most obviously unscientific. When a man starts a school of poetry, you can be sure that he has an impulse to create something unique, but lacks the energic capacity to sit down and do it. Every great poem is a school of poetry, but it does not issue circulars about itself. Futurism, Imagism, Vorticism, the "Sceptric School," Polyrhythmic Poetry—all these names, and the others, are efforts to compensate a sense of creative inferiority. So let them pass.

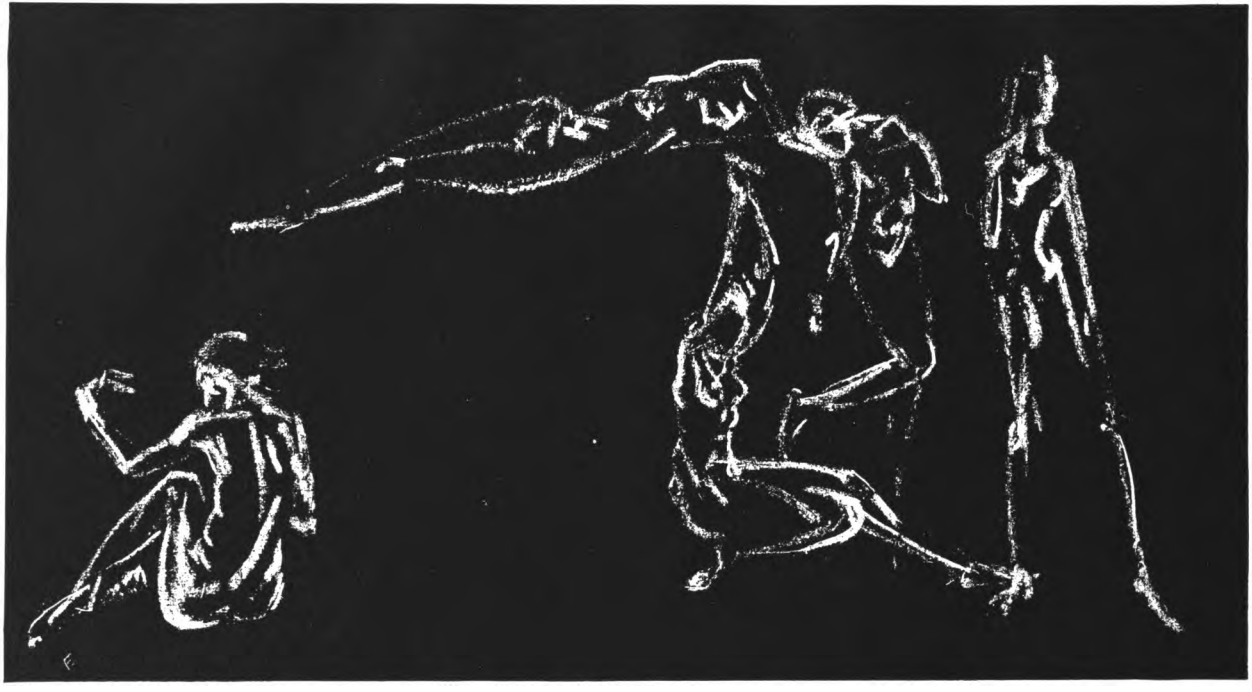
But that poetry is more and more being written without meter, and that in consequence more and more poetry is being written, and that those who so write are most of them convinced that they have gained in freedom and power to convey realizations to the imagination, is a fact which any true science

of poetry will have to consider. It will have to estimate the motives, and weigh the values of the "free-verse" tendency in general. I am going to make a beginning in that direction by pointing out that *in the majority of cases* a mere lack of energetic idle time, or the habit of intense concentration, is the motive to free verse, and the only value gained is the journalistic dilution which enables poetry to expand and multiply and cover space, as all the rest of our writing does in this day of the innumerable magazines and the enormous newspaper.

To read William Blake's poem "To the Evening Star," or to read passages of the Psalms, or Song of Solomon in the English Bible, or of Tagore's or Giovannitti's poems, is enough to prove to any one that realizations of the utmost poignancy can be conveyed without meter by the poetic use of names. Perceptible forms too can be engendered in that exaltation in which qualities of thought or passion have as clear definition as qualities of sound. Even the very absence of form, and often of intensity itself, can have poetic value in so unique an

achievement as Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass." It was necessary that some miraculously powerful poet should burst up through the fine pages of recorded high passion with the uncouth realities of the hours of a man's every-day life. This could only be done with the every-day manners of language. It could only be done irregularly, *verbosely*. It could only be done *unsatisfactorily*, for if it were satisfying it would not be the unqualified and incommensurable reality that was required. But persons who have drunk the whole draught of Walt Whitman's poetry and realized that it is an eternal achievement in literature, and persons who think the English Bible and many other unmetrical visions are exalted poetry, are still entitled to find the general tendency of modern "Free Verse" dissolving and wearisome in an extreme degree.

There are two kinds of people who become infected with journalistic free-verse—poets and prose-writers. The motive which brings prose-writers to this form is the same as the motive which makes magazine editors fill prose full of paragraphs, and



A MELODY. ARTHUR B. DAVIES

little sub-heads that have nothing to do with the subject of discussion. It is a business of "breaking up the type." It is a part of the new art of display-advertising. It makes the prose easy to read. And the necessity of that is a direct outcome of the fatness of the Sunday newspaper. We live under the weight of so much printed material, for the daily absorption of which we feel responsible, that every effort must be made to tickle us and kick us and jog us along so we will get through anything to the conclusion. So far from being a return to primitive, naïve or simple styles of writing, this breaking up of continuity in lines neither demanded by mechanics nor suggested by musie, is the height of effort at sophisticated stimulation of a jaded perception.

Poets write the new free verse for a more complicated series of reasons, the matrix of which is indeed primitive. It is the aboriginal indolence, which if it had been one ounce heavier would have eliminated the necessity of our writing poetry at all, or doing anything else that pertains to energic civ-

ilization. I am speaking now of the poets who have passion and talent enough to produce in their lifetimes a few gems of concentrated expression, but who have fallen in with the flow of the magazines, and accepted their fatal facility as the type of literature in our time. Another side of this question is presented by the fact that free-verse advertises the chance of poetic creation to many persons who ache with feelings but lack the agility of wit that metrical and rhymed excellence demand. They have gained confidence to express themselves in poetry, and for that all wise lovers of the art will be thankful. But even for them, now they have made the venture, it may be that a more rigorous self-discipline, though it should not produce so many poems that were "all right," would produce lines and passages more adequate to their passion, and more stimulating than mere "acceptableness" to those who read them. At least it is of dubious benefit to an art that more people should undertake it *merely* because its difficulties have been relaxed by an easier convention. It used to require a very high combi-

nation of faculties of heart and brain, with strong concentration added to these, to make a poem which would endure reading it all. To-day all one has to do is to say something. And any one who has something to say can do that.

A person whom I suspected of trying to propagate one of those self-advertising schools of poetry, by calling some free-verse effluvium "polyrhythmics," once mailed me at my request a loose-sheet note-book, and I submit my response as a proof of this statement.

I like this end-opening note-book.
I would like a side-opening note-book too.
I find them so yielding to poetry,
So yielding also to prose,
Ay, even to polyrhythambics, the songs of the parrot-cage,
So yielding and so sweet to the assaulting pen.
In hyper-dactyls and duck-billed trochaics I will sing—
If you can call that song which is the very soul
Of loose-necked indolence and club-headed slothfulness of being—
Yes, even in these vegetable polypods of prosic poetry
I will put forth small buds of thought and feeling.
I will celebrate the paper that I sing them on,

And ask you, by the muse of mussiness and paleness and decline,
To send me on another note-book, open at the side,
And measuring ten by eight; for ten is not too many inches,
Nor is eight too few,
To plant these boneless syllables, these molluscs of mute nature, on,
These water-fat amorphous multitudes,
In copulating rows that shall regenerate unto infinity,
And crowd the world with stringy puddles of inarticulation,
Until red hells of vengeance like the flames of poetry
Arise in revolutionary number,
Purging space and holy nature of this slow and sleep-engendering gangrene,
And sending down to violent oblivion and intense decay,
With one last heaven-searching scream that shall alone remain in memory,
Their pusillanimated authors.

It is not only the ingenuity of mind demanded to construct, without awkwardness and artificiality, the compelling forms of poetry, that is lacking in these journalistic poets; it is that rhapsodic trance of the whole being which makes those forms savagely aspired to as a war-dance or a hypnotic drug. People who declare that there are "no new rhythms" pos-

A DESIGN. ARTHUR B. DAVIES

sible in metric poetry, are people so neuralized with effete parlor civilization that their vital organs are incapable of resounding to the fundamental trance-engendering stroke of the tom-tom. They are incapable of hypnosis. They are incapable of naïvely falling asleep to dream. They do not know what fundamental rhythm is. If they did, they could not but distinguish that in their minds from the superficial forms of phrasal music which an artist inevitably superimposes upon it, and they would know that just as many phrasal patterns are possible in a fundamental rhythmic trance, and a great many more probable, than in the state of hyper-sophistical intellectual preciosity which they have found out how to exploit as primitive and free. Too much neural excitation and too little of the booming pulse of the blood is what distinguishes this freedom from the freedom of the poet who is lost in a rhapsody of song. It is easy to be free by simply declining to engage a medium offering a resistance of its own; but to be free by virtue of the power to conquer with your passion everything that stands

against it in the genuine utilities of an art, is a freedom worthy of the boast.

To use line division at all is to acknowledge the organic value to imaginative realization of the semi-regular recurrent stimulus, out of which in aboriginal recitative the forms of poetry arose. To use it with arbitrary opportunism, so that no judgment or choice, human or superhuman, not even your own, could ever put your poem together again if it fell apart, is neither primitive nor free, nor interesting, but simply obtuse. It reveals a lack of sensibility to the real quality of the thing.

In all arts it is the tendency of those who are ungrown to confuse the expression of intense feeling with the intense expression of feeling—which last is all the world will long listen to. The journalistic vogue of free-verse encourages this kind of confusion in poetry. It gets people to spend an entire literary life cultivating an emotional personality instead of cultivating an art, because there is not enough resistance in the medium of the art to make it worth going up against. In order to produce anything

A MELODY. ARTHUR B. DAVIES

which will compel attention beyond the vogue of the Sunday paper and the every-day magazine, it is necessary to concentrate attention upon the making of something, more even than upon the passion out of which it is made; and that is one thing that the forms of rhythmic poetry compel us to do. Having the habit of such effort, it is not impossible that we might on some occasion achieve one of those formless forms, like Blake's, that are so rare as to be remembered through the centuries. It is not impossible that we might subdue the listener to our passion without form as well as without metrical music. Nothing can be declared impossible to the whims of the artistic impulse. But the general deliquescence of all high-strung and concentrated expression which the journalistic commerce of our time is accomplishing can be declared incompatible with the whole spirit of art. And that any writer living in this wide stream of watery verbal emotion can learn to produce great poetry by pouring these long verses into that stream, can be declared tragically doubtful.

WHY ENGLISH DOES NOT SIMPLIFY HER SPELLING

WHY ENGLISH DOES NOT SIMPLIFY HER SPELLING

SOME people like to reform everything they can get their hands on. Others want to fold away and worship whatever is presented to them by the caprice of history. The world is pretty evenly divided between these two. And if only Creation had thought to make all the radicals red and all the conservatives white, it would have been a great convenience. For there is no use in trying to estimate a man's opinions until you discover to which of these fundamental schools he belongs. If he belongs to the reds, you take everything that he says with a grain of salt, and make up for not following his advice by enjoying his company. If he belongs to the whites, you take what he says (with all due respect for his gray hair and family connections) with a grain of pepper. Perhaps the drift of these re-

marks will reveal the fact that I am a red. I like to meddle and tinker. I would rather go from bad to worse than let well enough alone. I belong to that disreputable class damned by Tacitus (or Cicero, or somebody who understood both Latin and human nature) as "desiring a revolution for its own sake." To such persons everything very obviously needs a change, and the only question with them is whether they have time to give the revolution their personal supervision. Instead of introducing myself, therefore, as the other debaters upon simplified spelling do, by wagging a long tail of university degrees, I give this more relevant information that I am a red, and that what I say about anything organized or established is generally taken at a considerable discount.

Such being my nature, I instinctively defend the Simplified Spelling Board. Its critics ought to remember that its motives are complex, like the motives of human beings. It is not reforming the language with a special view to spelling-books, or printing-presses, or international diplomacy, or phonetics, or

logic, or historic truthfulness; it is moved by all these considerations at once. To reform a thing means to make it better than it was; and in order to make a language better, it is necessary that all human interests be considered. The Spelling Board is trying to consider them all. Somehow it has got stuck in the popular mind that the chief purpose of this reform is to make it easy for the Germans to learn our language, so that we will not have to learn theirs. That is one very important consideration; but there are others just as important. "Historical Propriety, Scientific Regularity and Practical Economy," says their last bulletin. These three. And the greatest of these is Practical Economy—which divides itself into economy in printing and writing and typewriting (five per cent. of our letters being considered superfluous), economy of eye-strain, economy of paper, economy of time spent by teachers and pupils (generously calculated at about a year for every pupil). We can save a good deal of money out of what we are spending for education and put it into battleships. Practical Economy is the chief

motive. But the others are there—"Historical Propriety," which some think is the only valid reason for anything, and "Scientific Regularity," which will make it possible for a child to reason out his own spellings. He will not so soon get the idea that education consists of being told. That is, to my revolutionary mind, the most important argument in favor of rationalizing our spelling. But no one of these arguments does all the work. The members of the Committee use them all. They try to strike a liberal attitude which will yield the highest values in each direction. When "Practical Economy" gets tired, they fall back on "Historical Propriety." When that wears out, they hitch up "Scientific Regularity." So you can generally suspect, when you see one of these arguments laid off, that the others are working.

It was a great joke, I thought, that the Board should fancy they were simplifying things when they took a few verbs that ended in *ed* in the past tense, and changed that ending to *t*. When you once learn that English verbs form their past in *ed*, it is no sim-

plification to have to remember that some of them cut it down to *t*. Ending in *ed* in the past was about the only consistent and respectable thing that English verbs ever did. Now that is gone, and we have a new exception on our hands. It used to be very smart to laugh at this "simplification"—but that was before you read the bulletins. After you read them, you found out that "Scientific Regularity" was not on the job there at all. It was "Practical Economy"—eye-strain, ink, paper, typewriters' fingers, proofreaders' nervous system—with "Historical Propriety" bossing the reform.

Of course it is a little amusing to the man who is not doing the work, to see a reformer get into trouble. After they get all those 900 long-tailed preterites in *ed* docked, then they have to go to work and lay out a new museum of exceptions.

"Verbs that end in *-ce* (*-ace*, *-ice*, *-ance*, *-ence*, etc.) in the infinitive cannot have the *d* in the preterit ending *-ced* simplified to *t*, because the resultant sequence *-ct* would be abnormal for the sound intended.

"The *-ed* cannot be spelled *-t* when the infinitive contains a long vowel written a—e (bake), e. .e (eke), etc., etc."

These exceptions make you sick with the old blackboard sickness. This is where the language kicks back. It won't rationalize. Nothing will. It is the same way with the universe. Every once in a while a philosopher sets out to reform the universe, and, for every new rule he puts up, the universe comes back with another batch of exceptions. The raw material can always raise you one higher, so to say, and that gives zest to the intellectual game. So it is with these grammatical exceptions. You could not eliminate them entirely, even if you had the remodelling of the human gullet. The object is, however, to reform the universe just all it can stand, but never forget that it was there first and you have to keep your eyes open.

Now there is one direction in which the Simplified Spelling Board has not kept its eyes open. One vital human interest, their bulletins of apology and exegesis never mention. I am not excited about it because I believe it will take its revenge. It will reform the reformation. But I take pleasure in pointing it out, because this is the first time I ever

discovered in my own mind anything like a conservative bias.

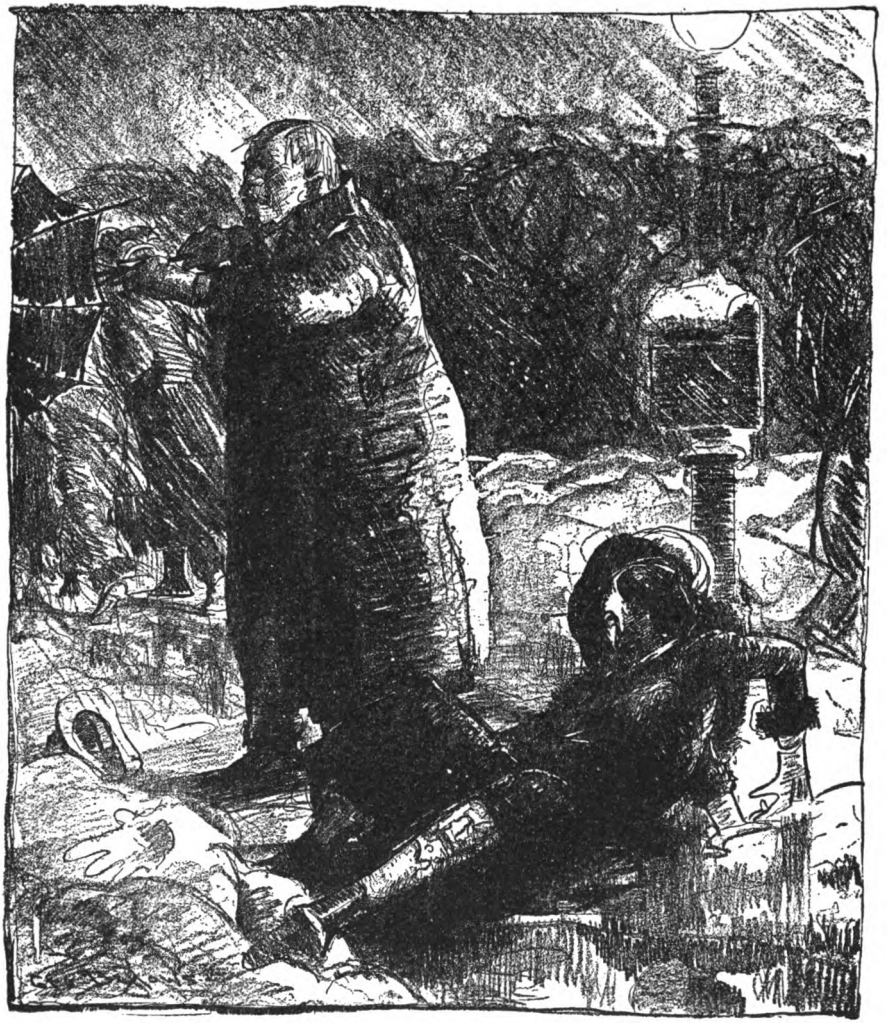
In an age which reduces all things to the so-called "practical test," we are prone to forget that a thing is practical only because it leads to an increase of some value which is not practical, but enjoyed for its own sake. If we are going to make our language practical, we change it in such a way as to make it more useful to us in getting those things which we want, not because they are useful, but just because we want them. There is no use saving money on schools, for instance, unless we can use it for something that we like better. And one of the things that we like, not because it is useful, but just because we like it, is literary art. A great many of the truest and best Americans are vitally interested in literary art. To them words have a value, not for what they can do only, but for what they are. As one of the chief values in literary art is variety (in the sound, appearance and associations of words), and as the work of the Spelling Board is an assault on the unparalleled varieties of the English language,

it is right for artists to demand that the Board have an eye to this interest. Looking through their publications, however, I find not the scantest allusion to the subject.

In one of their circulars, after congratulating themselves upon the support of scientists, they proceed as follows:

"On the other hand, the most vociferous of our opponents have been men of letters. It is pleasant to record that many of the foremost figures of contemporary American literature can be counted as ardent advocates of our cause. But it is indisputable also that some writers of prominence have revealed themselves as tied fast in the bonds of prejudice and as glorying in their enslavement. Perhaps, however, this is to be wondered at less than it is to be deplored, since it is the duty of the lyrists and of the romancers to use the language as best they can, and they are under no obligation to acquaint themselves with its history or with the principles which govern its growth."

That paragraph is not very profound. Men of letters are just as prejudiced as, and perhaps a little more ignorant, than, anybody else; but they are human beings too, and as such the prime fact about



A HUSBAND.

"BY GOD, MARIA, I BELIEVE WE'VE BUSTED THIS UMBRELLA!"

GEORGE BELLOWS

them is that they are interested in their own interests. They are under no obligation to acquaint themselves, it says, with the history of the language or the principles that govern its growth. Indeed, they are not; and neither is any scientist, or typewriter, or proofreader, or schoolma'am, or steel manufacturer, or politician—nobody, in fact, but a few blue-spectacled lexicographers and close-eyed root-ferrets who make their living that way. They can't reform the language. The language will be reformed, if it is reformed, by a great army of persons whose differing interests are all subserved by the change, and the "Historical Propriety" people are an exceedingly insignificant squad in that army. Men of letters—especially the more subtle—do not belong to that army, because they are (like men of everything else) "tied fast in the bonds of prejudice" in favor of the things that they like best.

Men of letters are not, as a rule, primarily interested in any one of those reliable old shifts—scientific regularity, historical propriety, or practical economy. They are working a different vein. They

make their living, if they can, out of psychological variety, and that is what they are hunting for. To condemn them because they are not interested in extricating European immigrants from the spelling-book, or smoothing down typewriters, or saving school money in order to emphasize the gestures of our navy, is as irrational as to condemn a natural-born red for wanting to revolutionize the language. They can't help it.

Now, to be fair to that quotation, I will explain what the writer meant by saying that literary objectors are tied fast in the bonds of prejudice and glorying in their enslavement. He meant that they are unwilling to give up the word-values and word-associations which they like, simply from habit, for others which are just as good, but which are unfamiliar to them. For instance, if you are a literary man, the word *debt* (spelled with a *b*) will have a special value for you and a great many rich associations. You have got used to the *b*, and the word will not fit comfortably into a page without it. It will not have just the same feeling-tone. But the

Spelling Board believes it is your duty, in the interests of other trades, to drop the *b* and get used to the new form, which is just as good in itself, and which will soon begin to carry all the associations that the old one carried. In that particular case the Spelling Board may be right. A great deal of the opposition to any reform arises from the selfishness of people who refuse to change their old habits for new ones that are just as good for them, and better for somebody else. On the other hand, it is very difficult to decide, in a given case, whether you are objecting to a new form just because it does not bear the old associations yet, or because it is by its intrinsic nature not fit to bear them. It is difficult to say whether *passiv* (with that abrupt and gymnastic ending) is unfit for the poetic representation of inactivity, or whether it merely *seems* unfit because we are accustomed to slide off on an *-ive*. It is difficult to distinguish the judgments of custom from the judgments of reason, but this is a very general infirmity, and it is not, like ignorance, peculiar to men of letters.

A man of letters, essaying to write gruesome poety, who should leave the *h* out of *ghost* and *aghast* and *ghastly* and *ghostly*, and the *w* out of *wraith*, and change the *re* of spectre to an *er* would be a fool. He would deservedly die of starvation. A ghost without an *h* is little better, for the purposes of poetry, than a goat. The *h* not only *is* connected by custom with the breathless and visionary moment, but for obvious reasons it *ought* to be. The word *ghost* is not at present associated with *post* and *most* and *roast* and *toast*, and a host of daylight experiences, and it is essential to the literary art that it should not become so. It is, with one or two others, a word by itself—a strange word, essentially unpronounced, unmuscularized, supernatural.

A member of the Simplifying Board brings forward, with the gusto of a bull routing the antiques out of a china-shop, a long parade of words that contain a needless *h*, thrust in by Caxton "after a Dutch fashion"—*ghuest*, *ghittar*, *ghospel*, *ghossip*, etc.—triumphantly pointing to the fact that we have got rid of this "awkward squad," and apparently won-

dering why *ghost* and its companions remain. Perhaps if the writer had a little more sympathy with the growers of language, with some less knowledge about its growth, he would be just as wise. "In Italian," he says, " 'hard' *g* before *e* or *i* is written *gh*, in French *gu;* but these devices are not needed in English." If they are not "needed," it is the more creditable to the artists, the true developers of the written language, that they were retained. It is the more creditable to them that they could tell the essential difference between a gossip and a ghost. "After a Dutch fashion," says he, with fine scorn. Whereas it is the pride and glory of the old Anglo-Saxon drift that it knew just where and when to borrow a jewel and slough off a scab. Every Continental nation has been robbed of its most intimate peculiarities. Asia and the treasuries of Ind have been levied upon. There is that word *wraith*, a jewel to me since childhood, a word to whose historical propriety and scientific regularity and practical economy I dwell in a most serene and blissful indifference, but a word borrowed, I know, by the

happy genius of the English people from some travelling caravan of foreigners or fates. The man that desecrates such a syllable, a unity and a symbol of evanescence, like the half-uttered breath of a spirit, is the mortal enemy of all artists. Be he red or white, their ways part before the altar of poetry.

Not only is that word a jewel because of its suggested sound and its appearance, both essentially depending upon the *w*, but it is precious for two other reasons. One of these is its uniqueness. There is nothing else in the world like it, and there shall never be. The other reason is that its verbal and literal associates are totally different from what they would be if the *w* were omitted. It would be one of a vulgar company—*rail*, *raid*, *rain*, etc.—without its unutterable beginning, whereas with that beginning it is as little like any of those words as the vision itself might be. It is potentially associated with *why* and *whither* and *where*, words of hesitation and wonder.

To many who cannot feel a word, or who feeling it cannot believe that their feeling depends upon such

trivial things, these will seem the refinements of decadence. The sound of a word, they will think, ought to be enough to satisfy a healthy poet. That the sound is by no means unique in importance, however, any one may demonstrate to himself by comparing the flavor of two such words as *rough* and *ruff*. Not only the appearance, either, determines the difference, but very largely the muscular sensations of the throat and mouth. I venture to say that, were our ears subtly aware of the finest overtones, we should find those words differently pronounced. Our muscular sense is aware of the finest overtones. *Rough* is a very different word from *ruff*, aside from its meaning, to the most practical man. To me, as it happens, *rough* is more sharply distinguished from *ruff* than it is from *bough*, the appearance being more effective in that case than the sound.

As the name of so fine and healthy an artist as Mark Twain is advanced upon the side of simplification, I appeal upon the question of the importance of these subtleties to a literary man of our times who almost rivalled him in popularity—Robert Louis

Stevenson. I can find nothing to quote which quite indicates his views on a spelling reform; but I take that essay, "On Some Technical Elements of Style in Literature," for assurance that he believed in the indispensability of subtle differences, not only in the sounds of words, but in their shape, and alphabetic associations, and size, and velocity, and grace. I quote a few significant, although not strictly apposite, words. The whole essay is apposite enough in the subtle perceptions which it reveals.

"And you will find another and much stranger circumstance. Literature is written by and for two senses: a sort of internal ear, quick to perceive 'unheard melodies'; and the eye, which directs the pen and deciphers the printed page. Well, even as there are rhymes for the eye, so you will find that there are assonances and alliterations. . . . Here, then, we have a fresh pattern—a pattern, to speak grossly, of letters—which makes the fourth preoccupation of the prose-writer, and the fifth of the versifier. At times it is very delicate and hard to perceive, and then perhaps most excellent and winning."

For further evidence that the perception of these hues and flavors is not an hypertrophy of the literary

organ, observe this remark of an artist in another field:

"And if we have lost so many things, which in some cases are lost forever, of what seemed to the makers of works of art in the past the very essence of their difference from other people, what other things do we not lose when, for example, in poetry the exact quality of a single vowel, its shading in the scale of sound, has so much expression, so much importance to us? Think of all the combinations of these simple elements in the style of a great poet. Each syllable has a personality of its own. . . ." *

Even a person of "scientific regularity" is constrained to recognize the visual and kinetic values of words, as appears in this passage from a recent work upon the "Psychology of Beauty":

"Manifold may be the implications and suggestions of even a single letter. Thus a charming anonymous essay on the word 'grey.' 'Grey is a quiet color for daylight things, but there is a touch of difference, of romance even, about things that are grey,' etc."

Without looking farther for proofs of good health and sanity, I will endeavor to set forth, with what

* John La Farge, "Considerations on Painting."

scientific regularity I can myself muster, the various effects of the proposed simplification upon the language as artistic material.

The first of these effects is the mutilation of many words which have a precious character by virtue of silent, or so-called "superfluous" letters. (1) These may be precious because their present form is like their meaning:

fragile	*fragil*	*thumb*	*thum*
numb	*num*	*scimitar*	*simitar*
scythe	*sithe*	*harangue*	*harang*
solemn	*solem*	*kissed*	*kist*
gazelle	*gazel*		

(I choose a few of these published changes at random, and, while some of them may represent personal prejudice, a universal truth remains. For instance, the *c* in *scythe* and *scissors* and *scimitar* is to cut with.)

The English language is especially rich in such words—termed "onomatopoetic." As words were many of them born of the perception of such analogies, so many of them have been retained or altered

A MORNING STROLL. H. J. GLINTENKAMP

by the same instinct. This accounts for untold "superfluous" or "illogical" letters. *Buz* is very good logic, but very poor poetry compared with *buzz*. The *b* in *dumb* and *lamb*, so the Historical Propriety man tells us, is "original"; the *b* in *thumb* and *numb* was inserted. But the reason why all four *b*'s are there now, is one and the same reason—namely, that each is, in a most delicate way, congruous with the meaning of its word. It is difficult to estimate things that are so unseizable as these, their elusiveness being the essence of their value. Like happiness itself, and like the motes before your eyes, when you look straight at them they run away into a corner and are not. But such gypsy things are most precious. In these ways our spelling is superior to the spelling of French and of German, and far superior to the spelling of Italian and Spanish. The practical economy man calls it "vicious." "It is unworthy of a practical people." "No better example could be found of the inconsistency of human nature," says he, "than the fact that the most businesslike of races has been so long content with the most unbusi-

nesslike of orthographies." There is nothing inconsistent about the practical economy man, however. He is practical from the front end of his pamphlet to the back. It is possible that he sees the Anglo-Saxon race under the shadow of his own nose. It is possible that, if he would look beyond his own age and province, he would find the Anglo-Saxon more notably artistic and intellectual than business-like. There is a race or two here that competes with us successfully in business. There is none in literature. And if he should find any further evidence of this unpractical bent, then the spelling could line up on the same side of the argument. The Anglo-Saxon race might thus prove almost as consistent as the economy man, for there is no written language more worthy of an artistic people.

(2) The destroyed words may be precious because their present form makes them unique, whereas the change reduces them to vulgarity.

nitre	*niter*	*sylvan*	*silvan*
mould	*mold*	*rhyme*	*rime*
although	*altho*	*autumn*	*autum*

build	*bild*	*campaign*	*campain*
choir	*quire*	*league*	*leag*
guardian	*gardian*		

Let *autumn* stand for a thousand tone-poems that the proposed reform would destroy. Literature will never relinquish *autumn.*

(3) Words may be precious, by virtue of "superfluous" or "illogical" letters, because these letters determine valued associations and prevent disastrous ones.

limb	*lim*	*sovereign*	*soveren*
courtesy	*curtesy*	*lamb*	*lam*
tongue	*tung*		

The words that find themselves, one way or another, in this list are innumerable. You can do what you like with *phthisis*, and *eggs*, and *cyclopædias*, and *hæmatins* (whatever they are), but when you try to make *courtesy* into an American there is a kind of folly in the effort. Courtesy belongs to the leisure of the *court;* it would die after two days in a *curt* atmosphere. No music would ever flow from a

tung; it could proceed as well from the *lung*, and it never has in the history of metaphor. And when it comes to trying to make a lamb *lam*, all poetry and religion protest. A lamb *can't* lam. He is too blunt. You might as well try to make a cow scream as to make a lamb *lam*.

It will be noticed, further, that most of the words quoted belong to more than one of these three lists. Some belong to all three. And in this connection I cannot forbear to return to the word *choir*. "Where the stars choir forth eternal harmonies"—sings to me from an old translation of Bruno, a phrase of which *choir* is the vital spirit. *Choir* is a word, so far as I can remember, absolutely unique, a word without any poor relations. *Quire*, on the other hand, besides a distinctly papery feeling of its own, has a whole rabble of disreputable low Latin verbs coming after it. The stars could never stoop to it. "Choir," says the historical propriety man, "is one of the worst spellings in the English language. It is a blundering mixture of the modern French spelling *chœur* with the real English spelling *quire*." Let us thank

PHILOSOPHER - ON - THE - ROCK: "GOSH, BUT LITTLE KIDS IS HAPPY WHEN THEY'S YOUNG!" GEORGE BELLOWS

God that we are blundering Anglo-Saxons. We do not see the English language through propriety spectacles, but with the ignorant prejudice of an outdoor eyesight. I could almost wish I were a man of letters, I am so glad that I am not the historical propriety man. *Choir* stays in my vocabulary.

But to proceed with scientific regularity, there is another effect (4) which simplified spelling has upon the literary material: it improves certain words in the same three ways I have mentioned.

riskt	*risked*	*gipsy*	*gypsy*
stampt	*stamped*	*clipt*	*clipped*

I do not classify these examples and spread them out and make a show of them, partly because I have developed a prejudice against the Simplifiers since I recalled their last desecration, and partly because there are not enough examples. It is obvious that a movement toward uniformity will tend to destroy rather than enhance associations and individualities; and it is obvious to one who knows how much onomatopœia has influenced the development of our lan-

guage that any logical and economical reprisals upon it would tend to destroy these cherished fabrics. In those words ending in *t* the gains and losses are about even. For instance, Whitman (who will not be accused of super-refinement) gained a similar flavor by writing, "Hush'd be the camps to-day." The hush actually occurs at that moment. And so it is with *clipt* and *dipt*, etc.[1] But *kist* is altogether wrong. It would do for a parlor encounter with an aunt.

In poetry sometimes we linger and sometimes we jump, but in "practical economy" we are always on the jump. A spare and naked line has a unique beauty—a line like this one of Shelley's, without a superfluous ounce for the eye or ear:

> "But list, I hear
> The small clear silver lute of the young spirit
> That sits on the morning star."

[1] From a literary standpoint it is desirable, within limits, to have a choice between two or more forms, and especially has this been appreciated in the case of past tenses. Keats uses the *t* and the *'d* and the *ed*, and it is undoubtedly a gain to be set more free in this respect by the Simplifiers.

But a language that was committed throughout to that style would be poor indeed:

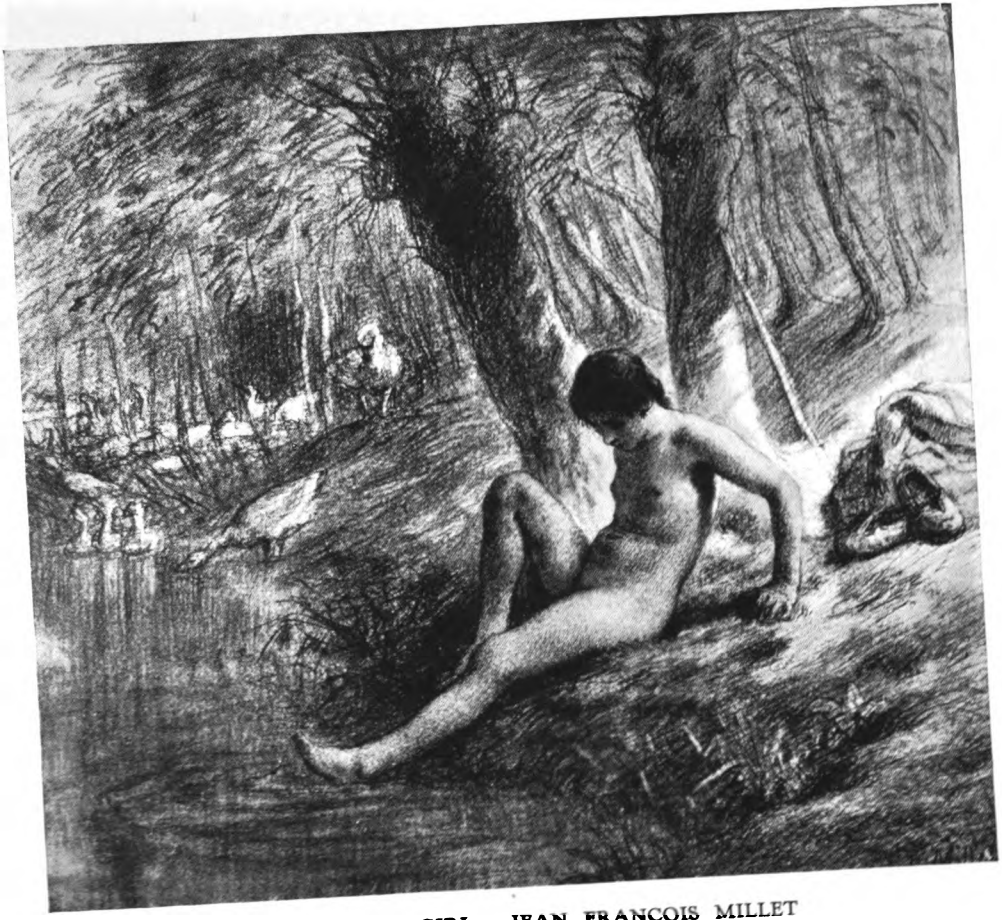
> "Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness!"
> "Seson of mists and mello frutfulness!" [1]

(5) The final, and possibly most important, effect of the simplification would be the loss of variety itself. The eccentricity of a given word, such as *through* or *enough*, may seem to have little intrinsic merit, but it is of general value to the literary artist that his material be diversified by these venerable prodigies. They help him to endow every phrase with a separate character. For every wild word or bundle of words that is trimmed down and fitted into a group, another resource is lost to the poet.

We boast that our language is not second to Greek in its power of conveying subtle impressions; and a great part of this power rests in the infinite number of phrase combinations possible. The Simplifiers aim to injure this power. An irreducible conflict therefore subsists between their practical, scientific and commercial interest and the art interest in our language, and that is why men of letters have been "the

most vociferous opponents." That they are not only "the most vociferous," but that they will prove also the most effective, remains to be pointed out.

It has already been stated that æsthetic judgment was the sovereign power in developing and controlling our language. Nothing else could have steered us through the Norman period, the season of our wild oats, the ecclesiastical oppression, the barbaric influence of scholars and propriety men, of pedants and scientific regulars, of King Charles's French peacocks, and of the modern utility people. It is the exquisite sensibility of the English folk that has conveyed to us through all these hideous onslaughts "a veritable power of expression, such as perhaps never stood at the command of any other people." I quote from Jacob Grimm. "In wealth, good sense and closeness of structure, no other of the languages at this day spoken deserves to be compared with it." But if the controlling interest has been æsthetic in the past, it is safe for the hopeful to assert that it will continue so in the future, and that, therefore, those who desire that English should become the great language



THE GOOSE GIRL. JEAN FRANÇOIS MILLET

of the earth do not begin wisely by making an assault upon its wealth.*

The impulse of ordinary childlike people is to cling to that thing which is not good *for* something, but good in itself. And that is why I believe that the artistic interest will reform the reformers. A few of their expedients will be chosen, are half chosen already; others will remain long as alternative forms; the language will clear itself and limber itself somewhat in response to the mania of expediteness that besets its American cultivators. The age will leave a characteristic mark; but it will leave, roughly speaking, only what is an addition to the wealth and not to the practical economy of its inheritance. A type of the usual arguments against simplification is that one which asserts that the forms of words are historic records significant of the interests of different ages, and that therefore we should leave them as they are. But if anything could be a better historic record, or more significant of this age, than the marks of vio-

* "English is remarkable for the intensity and variety of the color of its words. No language, I believe, has so many words specifically poetic."—*George Santayana, in "The Sense of Beauty."*

lence left by its attempt to make the language *practical* we have yet to be informed of it. Such marks will undoubtedly be left upon the language; but they will be subservient to that general æsthetic development which so envelops the Simplifiers that they remain totally incognizant of its existence. The real treasurers of the language are and always have been the knowers of its immediate beauty.

This is so certain that, but for the satisfaction of showing hands on the victorious side, it were futile to argue about it. With entire truth the Simplifiers point out that their critics have advanced no reason or valid argument against them. This may be because the lovers of poetry are too sure of her power to enter the lists. It may be because they are but dimly conscious of the reasons for their choice, and are confused between the values that they perceive to arise from habit and those which they know to inhere in the nature of the words. But, whatever the cause of their silence, it is clear that their opposition to the movement is arbitrary and self-justified and unanswerable. It is a difference of wish.

There is, however, an allied reason for opposing the simplification which is based upon an interest common to all parties. It is the interest in democratic culture. You can deduce from the examples and quotations given, that our inheritance of poetry and excellent literature will either survive in the old spelling or suffer immense mutilation. Reverence for the classics is the prime conservative element in the growth of language. And I believe that the classics will resist an arbitrary and extensive change in their spelling; they will not be profitably published in the revised forms. If I am right, it is obvious that a great change in the common usage would at once set these monuments aloft and apart from our everyday life. Our best literature could no longer flow in the minds of the people. It would be a written language, the genius of which would have to be learned. Therefore, it would belong to the scholars and the leisure class, as Chaucer already does. That this alienation of literature from lively speech is a peril always imminent, needs no proof. But the recasting of our commercial language by a

committee of persons who acknowledge nowhere a tittle of the claims of art, is a direct invitation of the peril. This is proven when it is confessed that the Committee is chiefly opposed by men of letters. Either we will mutilate our inheritance or it will recede from us; a lover of poetry and democracy cannot accede to either alternative. And that dilemma, added to an estimation of the immediate values to be lost, leads many even of those who are blessed with an irreverent and meddlesome nature, to turn their backs upon this ill-considered revolution.

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